

aspirations or interests of magnates or people. The States-General, which had ventured to couple its parting tribute with the demand for the withdrawal of the Spanish troops, were especially objectionable. Why not ask himself as well to demit his sovereignty, burst out Philip wrathfully?

In spite of valetudinarian listlessness Philip had his convictions and passions. He had the autocratic instinct, and, though too small a man to play the autocrat with success, he developed a prodigious application in directing the government of his vast dominions. He was fond of writing directions to his councillors, despatches to his envoys. He sat for hours at the council board, and liked to lose himself in a multiplicity of details ; yet he was very dependent on his ministers—Ruy Gomez and Alva in particular, who added to his vacillation by their personal hostility, their divergent policies. To scribble industriously and swirl continually in the whirlpool of divergent councils was a sorry *role* for an autocrat, but, in spite of natural inaptitude, his bent was towards despotic methods. He wished his will to be law, untrammelled by liberties, or privileges, or usages, and he was still more hostile than his father to anything like political progress or independence. He was by no means a born ruler of men; his abilities were those of plodding mediocrity. But he was a born egotist, and, in virtue of his egotism, he made his personality felt in affairs. Spain and the Netherlands soon felt what it meant to be governed by a man who had all the petty self-will of the born egotist without the real ability of the born ruler. On one point he permitted himself no irresolution, suffered no divergence of opinion, whether in Spain or the Netherlands. The faith must be preserved; heretics, of whatever rank or persuasion, exterminated. He was resolute in playing the despot pure and simple over the conscience. He was more monk than king in the matter of religious observances, though not in abstinence from sensual indulgence. He was licentious, but he was as regular as the clock in his devotions, and had a great reverence for the monks who preached to him and discussed theology with him. Charles could bend piety to policy, ally himself with the heretic when it suited him, even sack Rome to punish a recalcitrant pope. Philip, too, could not always keep his religion free from political entanglement.